

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-02 OC-06 CCO-00 SY-05
OMB-01 AID-05 PC-01 DHA-02 /073 W
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O R 032210Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3545
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 1013

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PGOV, ES
SUBJECT: SITREP - STATE OF SIEGE CALMS THINGS DOWN

REF: SAN SALVADOR 0937

1. EL SALVADOR IS NOW IN THE THIRD DAY OF A PLANNED
THIRTY DAY STATE OF SIEGE. THE GOES ANNOUNCED IMPOSITION
OF THIS "TEMPORARY SUSPENSION" OF A NUMBER OF CONSTITUTIONAL
GUARANTEES ON MONDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 28. THIS WAS THE
DAY AFTER THE SECURITY SERVICES HAD CLEARED THE PLAZA
LIBERTAD OF AN OPPOSITION PROTEST RALLY. AS REPORTED REFTEL,
THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE GOVERNMENT'S REMOVAL OF
CLARAMOUNT'S SUPPORTERS FROM THE PLAZA APPEARED TO HAVE
ENDED BY 0700 FEBRUARY 28 WHEN THE LAST OF THOSE WHO TOOK
REFUGE IN THE EL ROSARIO CHURCH WERE GIVEN A GUARANTEE OF
SAFE EXIT BY THE SALVADORAN RED CROSS AND LEFT THEIR ASYLUM.
2. THE GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY PROCLAIMED OVER THE
MEDIA THE REESTABLISHMENT OF LAW AND ORDER IN THE
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CENTER CITY. THIS ANNOUNCEMENT CLAIMED THAT THE
GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN FORCED TO USE "NON-LETHAL
FORCE" TO REMOVE "COMMUNISTS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS"
FROM THEIR ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF PLAZA. RADIO SPIEL
ASSURED THE NATION THAT EVERYONE COULD RETURN TO
THEIR NORMAL PURSUITS, I.E., THE DEMONSTRATIONS AND
VIOLENCE WERE OVER. THE BROADCAST INSISTED THAT NO

ONE HAD BEEN HURT BY THE SECURITY SERVICE ACTIONS OF THE PRECEDING EVENING.

3. THIS GOVERNMENT ASSERTION WAS SUSTAINED FOR LESS THAN TWO HOURS. BY NINE AM GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA HAD ENCOUNTERED LARGE ANTAGONISTIC CROWDS. SEVERAL OF THESE ENCOUNTERS LED TO THE TROOPS OPENING FIRE. DATT AND HUNDREDS OF OTHERS SCATTERED IN ONE OF THE FIRST INCIDENTS, WHEN THE POLICE FIRED DIRECTLY INTO A CROWD, EXPENDING MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED ROUNDS. SPORADIC SHOOTING WAS HEARD FROM VARIOUS PARTS OF DOWNTOWN THROUGHOUT THE DAY, TERMINATING AT ABOUT 1800 HOURS. A NUMBER OF CARS AND BUSES WERE OVERTURNED AND/OR BURNED.

4. THE PRESIDENT ADMITTED THERE WERE FIVE DEATHS, SOME SIXTY WOUNDED, AND ANOTHER TWO HUNDRED "DETAINED". THE ACTUAL COUNT IS PROBABLY HIGHER (SEVERAL NORMALLY RELIABLE EMBASSY CONTACTS REPORTED SEEING ARMY TRUCKS WITH STACKED BODIES HEADING OUT OF TOWN DURING THE DAY). WHATEVER THE BODY COUNT, THE TOTALITY OF THE VIOLENCE WAS A SHOCK TO THE CAPITAL'S CONSCIENCE AND NERVES. THE PRESIDENT TOLD REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS ON MARCH 1 THAT MOST OF THE DETAINEES WERE YOUTHS WHO WOULD QUICKLY BE RELEASED TO THEIR PARENTS' CUSTODY. A FEW, HE SAID, WOULD BE PROCESSED FOR VARIOUS MRIMES AGAINST PUBLIC ORDER AND NATIONAL SECURITY.

5. THE SAME EVENING (FEB 28) THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAD APPROVED A STATE OF SIEGE, SUSPENDING FOUR ARTICLES OF THE 1962 CONSTITUTION DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS. THESE WERE: ARTICLE 154# WHICH DEALS WITH THE RIGHT TO ENTER AND LEAVE THE COUNTRY AND RESIDE WHEREVER ONE WANTS; ARTICLE 158, THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS ONES OPINION AND FREEDOM OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PRESS; ARTICLE 159, INVIOABILITY OF CORRESPONDENCE; AND ARTICLE 160, THE RIGHT OF FREE ASSEMBLY. THE GOVERNMENT TRIED TO REASSURE THE POPULACE THAT THE SUSPENSION WAS A TEMPORARY MEASURE, AND WOULD BE APPLIED WITH DISCRETION. THE GOES ADDED THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE ALSO MEANS THAT PERSONS ACCUSED OF CERTAIN CRIMES--TREASON, ESPIONAGE, REBELLION, ETC--WOULD BE PROCESSED BY THE MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM.

6. TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY AND TODAY HAVE SEEN THE CITY GRADUALLY RETURN TO NORMAL. THE CENTRAL PLAZA HAS BEEN CLEANED OF DEBRIS AND REOPENED TO VEHICULAR TRAFFIC FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EIGHT DAYS. TROOPS REMAIN POSTED THROUGHOUT THE TROUBLE ZONE, BACKED BY ARMORED VEHICLES AND AUTOMATIC WEAPONS. THE EMBASSY HAS HEARD OF NO DEATHS OR SERIOUS INJURIES SINCE TUESDAY, MARCH 1. BUSINESS AND COMMERCE IN THE CENTER, IN GREAT PART SHUTTERED FOR THE LAST THREE DAYS, HAS FOR THE MOST PART REOPENED.

7 COMMENT. ALTHOUGH THE IMMEDIATE POST-ELECTION UPHEAVAL AND PROTEST APPEAR ENDED, A GENERAL CONSENSUS EXISTS THAT THE COUNTRY HAS A TENSE, POSSIBLY VIOLENT, PERIOD AHEAD. THE ELECTION ITSELF, THE AFTERMATH OF THE

OCCUPATION OF THE PLAZA AND THE UNEXPECTED ATTRACTION OF CLARAMOUNT-IN-THE-PLAZA AS OPPOSED TO CLARAMOUNT-THE-CANDIDATE, AND FINALLY THE REPRESSIVE MANNER IN WHICH THE SECURITY FORCES DEALT WITH THE OCCUPATION AND THE FOLLOWING DAY'S DISTURBANCES, ALL ADD UP TO A NERVOUS POPULACE, AN OFFICER CORPS EXTREMELY CONCERNED WITH THE IMAGE OF THE COUNTRY AND OF THE ARMED FORCE, AND INCREASED SPECULATION ON WHETHER OR NOT GENERAL ROMERO WILL ACHIEVE THE PRESIDENCY COME JULY 1.
LOZANO

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